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PRESS RELEASE

National Poll Finds Citizens More Optimistic

The results of an opinion poll of 1,108 adults in Macedonia, conducted between June 13 and June 18, 2007, shows that citizens remain optimistic following last year's parliamentary elections, with citizens who believe that Macedonia is moving in the "right" direction (34%) outpacing those that believe it is moving in the "wrong" direction (27%) for the first time in the history of this polling program. Despite this retained optimism Macedonian citizens continue to be concerned about the state of the economy. Seventy-eight percent of respondents cite unemployment, the economy, and the standard of living as the most important problems facing Macedonia. Many respondents remain optimistic that the current Government will address these problems with a substantial number of respondents (44%) believing the economic situation in the country will be better in two years.

The public opinion survey was carried out by the International Republican Institute (IRI) through an ongoing project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a part of the U.S. Mission in Macedonia. The actual survey was conducted by the local research supplier Brima, in collaboration with an American research firm, Williams and Associates of Salem, Massachusetts. The results of this poll were presented to representatives of various political parties in Macedonia between July 2-5, 2007.

"Public opinion polls are an important means in representative democracies to keep the political parties and leadership in touch with the issues of concern to the citizens they represent. We are pleased to make this information available to the people, media, and political leaders of Macedonia," comments Patricia Rader, Mission Director of USAID in Macedonia.

When asked what the government's priority should be, 55% considered employment as the top priority, 12% cited poverty and the low standard of living in the country, and 11% viewed the economy as the most important priority for the government to address.

When asked if Macedonia was moving in the "right" or "wrong" direction, 34% of respondents responded that they believe things are moving in the right direction, a four percent increase from the March survey. The poll also records a 4% decrease in those who believe Macedonia is moving in the wrong direction, to 27%. Optimists now outpace pessimists for the first time in the history of this polling program by a margin of 7%.

"The change in governing parties last summer seems to be behind this optimistic turn in the electorate. However, the ability of the government to retain this level of support will, of course, depend on their handling of the still serious structural economic problems facing the country," comments Dave Williams of Williams and Associates.

According to the poll, 94% of respondents continue to believe that foreign investment is a key element in securing Macedonia's future economic growth. When asked what requirements are important for attracting foreign investment, 98% of respondents say peace and stability, tied by stable government (98%), and followed by fighting corruption (97%), a skilled workforce (95%), and computer literacy (94%).

Support for Macedonia's membership in NATO and the EU continues at very high levels. Support for entering the European Union is at 95%, the same as in the March survey. Support for Macedonia entering NATO is at 91%, up two percent from the March survey and sets a new historical high for this response in our survey program.

The results of the opinion poll are available at www.USAID.org.mk

The margin of error for this poll is $\pm 3\%$ overall.

The American people, through USAID, have invested more than \$450 million in Macedonia since 1993. More than 25 projects worth \$25 million a year are currently being implemented. These projects are designed to support Macedonia's transition to a free market-based, multi-ethnic democracy. They include initiatives to accelerate economic growth, develop democratic institutions, and educate citizens for a modern economy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) works with Macedonian political parties to enhance their ability to identify and respond to issues of concern among the electorate and to provide citizens with increased avenues of participation. IRI utilizes public opinion polls to help political parties in issue identification and advocacy, message development, and communications and voter outreach. IRI polls are designed to keep parties grounded in the issues of real concern to the electorate.